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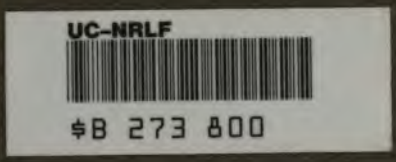

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BY

WALTER LINDLEY, M. D.

Superintendent of the Whittier State School.

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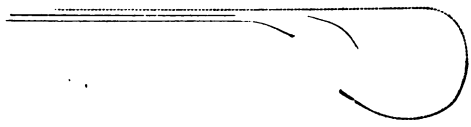
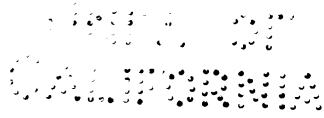
What is the State's Duty to its Unfortunate Children?



An Address read before the Congress of Religions at Golden Gate Hall, San Francisco, April 21, 1894.



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WHAT IS THE STATE'S DUTY TO ITS UNFORTUNATE CHILDREN?

This gigantic problem looms up ominously before us. The American mind is active and full of resources. Our educators tell us of a new education, and of the laboratory plan of teaching history and the natural sciences, but crime stalks onward with giant strides; new religions are launched upon us, the Salvation Army invades the slums, but crimes and criminals still increase in a far greater ratio than the increase of population. Temperance movements, moral revolutions and nineteenth century Savanarolas all seem impotent to stay in the least the mighty tide of crime that is sweeping forward with unrelenting certainty over this great republic. Whether we look toward the poor Indian who falls dead while playing poker in a Los Angeles jail, or toward the Yale or Princeton student, who is seen in bacchanalian orgies that equal those of the noble debauchees of ancient Rome—in whatever direction we look the hideous form of crime is seen making its slimy trail.

There is one thing apparent to all, and that is that the right remedy has not yet been efficiently applied. It is not through lack of use of money, because in California we are paying out annually for schools, prisons and asylums, over $12,500,000. There must then be something fundamentally wrong in our educational and penal systems. The public school system of the United States is the corner stone of this republic. Education! education! education! is the watchword of the hour. Without free and universal education hope vanishes. Then we reach this point—the theory is right, the application faulty.

What should be the object of public education? The object of education at the public expense should be the

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practical equipment of our youth for the great struggle of life. Is our present system doing this? Over ten million dollars are being spent annually in California on her schools, and how many of our boys and girls are being prepared to cope with the question of earning their daily bread? It is wonderful how large a proportion of our California boys and girls have a good public school education, but it is appalling to see the immense number of them who can find nothing to do because they have not been taught how to do anything.

You and I propose to defend this public school system against its most insidious foes—yes, defend it with our life blood, if necessary! Let us then fortify our position by disencumbering this system of superfluities and making it invulnerable. Industry and probity, like idleness and crime, are synonymous terms; then let us make our public schools hives of physical as well as mental industry.

The State of California is spending its millions, yet to-day, out of nearly 250,000 children who are attending our schools, not one hundred are being taught practical avocations by which they can make a living. Even those schools that have been progressive enough to add manual training to their system, boast that they do not teach trades. The spirit imbibed in our public schools to-day is an antipathy to trades and a feeling of commiseration for the man who carries a dinner pail.

To give you an idea of the few Americans who are learning trades, three years ago it was advertised in San Francisco, and elsewhere, that a man to teach cutting and tailoring, salary $100 per month and board, was wanted. Only one man applied, and he was a Scandinavian, who proved unsatisfactory. Again the effort was made, and this time the only one who applied was a Russian Jew, who did not hold the position long, and again the word went forth that the position was vacant, and this time the only one who applied was a man who, though very efficient, was a native of Greece. Out of $23,000,000 paid annually to mechanics in the building trades in New York

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city less than six millions goes to those who are American born. In other words, $17,000,000 of that American money goes to foreigners, and yet 3,000,000 Americans are walking our streets to-day vainly asking for work.

Oh, no, it is un-American to learn trades. The boys who are to fill the vacancies that will occur during the next decade in the great army of skilled mechanics in the United States are receiving their training in France, Italy, England and Germany, and they are the sons of French, Italian, English and German parents. The son of the average American, after getting a common school education, learns to draw some, sing a little, and may reach the high school and get a smattering of Latin; the son of the Emperor of Germany learns a trade.

All experience goes to prove that the boy who devotes a part of each day to physical labor makes a better student than he who devotes all the time to intellectual labor, varied only by athletic sports. Three hours a day is as long as any child should be in the school room. The same number of hours should be devoted to physical labor. Divert some of the money that is being spent in school room education to training in physical labor. A system could be developed by which the product of these shops could be sold, where they were articles not needed in the schools, and in time the expense would be comparatively small. In the village or country school district, it would be very easy to make an arrangement with an intelligent farmer and orchardist to have all of the school come and receive two hours daily practical instruction in soils, fertilizers, varieties of fruit trees, and their enemies. Every boy in this district school, and every girl, too, if you please, should learn to plant, bud, transplant and prune. The wife of this instructor in farming should be able to teach sewing and housekeeping, and the girls, yes and the boys, should be systematically taught cooking, that art in which the American is so notoriously deficient.

We all enjoy music, but along with the beautiful melodies of the piano let us teach our American boys the

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music of the hammer and the saw, for it was under that influence our Savior was developed into the highest nobility of character the world has ever known; we are inspired by the grand, sonorous tones of the organ, but there is something far more inspiriting in the swinging ring of the anvil as the young man welds the iron and shapes the molten piece into some article of practical utility; the violin is the prince of musical instruments, and Ole Bull was the king of violinists, but there is far more grandeur in the life of Henry Wilson, who received his inspiration from the music that came from the shoemaker's bench.

Allow that a modification of our school aystem is needed, who will act? The teacher cannot do it; she is simply one little but most necessary cog wheel in a great piece of machinery, and any divergence on her part would throw everything out of gear; the principal cannot do it, for he must bow submissively to the superintendent; the superintendent cannot do it, for he must bend the knee to a board of education usually controlled by ward politicians; the board of education cannot do it, because you elected them to their positions, knowing that the best you could possibly expect of them would be that they would conduct the schools respectably well, according to existing methods. Oh, no, you cannot place this crime against our American youth on any official's shoulders. You, the intelligent voters and tax payers, are the responsible parties.

This passing glance at the way we are *not* giving our children an education. Let us cast our eyes for a few minutes towards our penal system. Here darkness reigns unchallenged. What is the object of depriving a criminal of his liberty? It should be two-fold—to protect society and reform the individual. The old ecclesiastical idea of avenging or revenging crime is barbarous. We may not be able to eliminate this notion from all our creeds, but for humanity's sake let us wipe it out of our codes. Crime is its own avenger. Is the penal system of California protecting society or reforming the individual?

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What do we do for our prisoners in our penitentiaries? We put on, first, the striped livery of degradation; seven hundred young men in California are wearing this livery to-day by your orders—fourteen hundred older men are also encased in this exterminator of hope. Then, after putting this young man in these clothes, he is sent in to take lessons of the most expert criminals the world has ever known. He is thoroughly trained in the most horrible sexual perversities, in the best methods of garroting men, in the use of opium, in stealing horses, in opening safes, waylaying stages, the use of vile language—he is initiated in the free masonry of crime. Signs, pass-words, grips and a special vernacular, are part of the education this young man receives at the expense of the State. With tears in their eyes young men beg to be allowed to work at trades or avocations that will prepare them to stand erect and be men among men when they leave the prison, but with a practical curse the State hurls them to enforced idleness or sends them to work in a jute mill. Why put a man to work in a jute mill? Because that is the only kind of work the State could think of at which a man would find it absolutely impossible to get employment after leaving the prison. The deliberate object of California is to unfit its criminals for honorable self support. Thus we drive the cold steel of oppression up to the hilt into the life of our fellow man, and as like begets like we develop within him a hatred for society, a detestation for law and order, and a fixed determination for revenge that only death will conquer.

Yes, but we have by no means yet revealed the far-reaching effects of the plan that the State has so carefully prepared. If it were only the money this young man himself would steal, the murders he would commit, the houses he would burn after leaving the prison, it would be a small matter comparatively; but no, remember, please, that in your penitentiaries you have provided criminal normal schools. Every man is being made a teacher, and when he comes out he does not have to wait for bonds to be voted to erect a school house; he teaches on the

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curbstone, in the groggery, along the wharves, and in the dark and noisome alley. No need, either, for a compulsory law to provide him with pupils. The boys crowd around him, and with eyes, mouths and ears open, they will listen intently to this hero as long as he will deign to instruct them.

California has sent out from her prison doors sixteen thousand penitentiary normal school teachers, and is now issuing diplomas at the rate of seven hundred annually. This is the way the State is not doing its duty to its unfortunate children. Again, humanity calls: Are you Americans? Arise, throw off the shackles of precedent and place upon your brother the amulet of hope. Make your penal system reformatory from the time the young man is arrested until he is reformed, and if he cannot be reformed—all might be reformed; but if he were not reformed, *isolate him for life*. Do not turn him loose to debauch our little children.

Who will inaugurate these changes? Not the wardens of our penitentiaries. Read their reports and you will learn that they have steadily advocated steps in the direction indicated. Were they to step forward without your orders they would lose their positions inside of a month, and probably be replaced by incapable men. No, this reformation must originate with you, the people of California, not with your employees.

The result of the inefficiency of our educational system, and the satanic efficiency of our penal system, is that many thousands of idle children and young men are wandering through the slums of our cities and tramping from one end of our State to the other. What is the State's duty to its unfortunate children? When the State has within its boundaries a child whose environments are wholly vicious, or who is beyond parental control, who has no parents, or who is worse than orphaned, then the State should step up to that child, place a loving hand upon his shoulder, and say, "Here, my boy, this is all wrong; come with me and I will be your parent." Then whose child is that? It is the State's child. Who is the State? You are the State, I am the State, we are the

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State. Then this unfortunate child becomes your child and my child—our child—and should no longer be an unfortunate child. Then the State should take this heretofore unfortunate child to a comfortable home.

How would you dress this child? Remember he is your child. Dress him healthfully, dress him so as to develop his self-respect. Dress him so that he will not hang his head. Dress him so that when people see him they will not say "Poor child." Pity and charity are the two most abominable words in the English language. They imply condescension and patronage. To be the object of the world's pity and charity is to be pauperized and sunk in ignominy. He was a wise man who said centuries ago: "I can defend myself from the abuse, kicks, frowns and scoffs of the world, but only God in his infinite mercy can protect me from its pity." It is said that flowers only flourish in the garden of one who loves them, and you may rest assured that this child which you—the State—have adopted will never develop into sturdy, honorable manhood, unless your actions towards him speak of love and duty, not pity and charity.

What food would you give this boy? What food would you give your own boy? Come to think of it this is your own boy. As this is our boy, we will give him what is most conducive to health and happiness, and plenty of it. Yes, says the voice of one who hangs back, but do you remember that he was a bad boy. I am sorry to say that I do remember that he was a bad boy, but I am trying to forget it, and I want the boy to forget it too just as quickly as possible.

As to the school. We shall only send him to school three hours daily, and we must have women for teachers. One pure-minded, noble woman, can manage one hundred boys with a smile far better than a policeman can control one boy with a club. What the State desires is to make this boy honorably self-supporting as quickly as possible. After this boy has had a bath, put on a good suit of clothing, eaten a square meal, we shall have a talk with him—or we want him to work. Here are these various trades

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and avocations. This boy may say he wants to be a cook, an orchardist, a carpenter, an electrician, a baker or a printer. He will want to do something, sure.

There are no lazy boys—there are simply misplaced boys. You were apparently a lazy boy when you were hoeing potatoes. Your mind was in the clouds, and when your time came that you could follow your natural inclinations you worked with enthusiasm and success. It is our business to give this boy an opportunity to develop to their best the faculties for special work with which Almighty God has endowed him. You will find that the boy is in closer communion with his Creator on this point than you are, and nine times out of ten his choice of a trade is correct.

Here we have the State's boy provided for intellectually, physically and industrially, but we have forgotten to attend to him spiritually. No, that is not forgotten. Send him to church the same as any other boy; but remember that he must have the boys' Sunday, not the Puritan's Sunday. I would rather this boy of ours would even play ball on Sunday than that he should reach the point where he would wish Sunday would never come.

Now, one thing more. We must take this boy of ours and tell him the story of his country. Let us point to that starry flag and tell him how it has often been baptized in blood, but has ever been victoriously planted upon the ramparts of the enemy. How the greatest patriots and heroes the world has ever known have been its defenders; we shall tell him that other nations must keep great standing armies, but the standing army of this nation is composed of the young men who are in our colleges, our workshops, our counting houses, and our fields, ever ready to spring to arms to defend that flag from the invader from without or the traitor from within.

Then we will have this boy of ours, this California boy, this American boy, instructed in military tactics, and as this boy marches to the music of the fife and drum, with "old glory" floating over him, his heart will swell with pride, his soul will expand with love of country, and he will become indeed an American patriot.

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Do you believe that there are children born, doomed and foreordained to be criminals? Have you ever for a single moment entertained any horrible theory like that? No, no, a thousand times *no*.

Do not look upon the ten thousand unfortunate children in California as a great, seething mass of corruption, forsaken by man and abhorred by their Creator; but remember that this appalling mass is composed of ten thousand individuals. Remember, also, that into each individual child Almighty God has breathed a living soul.

A few weeks ago I was sitting in a lobby of a hotel in San Francisco. A bright, hearty, comfortably-dressed young man came up to me, like he was coming up to an old friend—which he was. Two years and three months before that boy was sent to the Whittier State School as one of the worst, most depraved, and most hopeless boys that San Francisco had ever known. After eighteen months he was returned to San Francisco, and I learned from other sources that he was doing well and had been working steadily. This evening he told me of his family. He said, "There's me, my brother, two sisters, and mother—she drinks. Me and my brother chips in and pays forty dollars a month to send our sisters to a convent boarding school. Brother and me, we thought it would be nice if we could have a little home, and have our sisters and mother all together. We went down where mother was and told her that if she would quit drinking we would rent a cottage and pay the expenses and she could keep house for us. Mother said, by all that was holy, she would never let another drop pass her lips, and was awful glad we were to get a house. We went away and then thought we had better go back again and see whether mother really meant what she said. Two nights later we kinder sneaked back to where she was, and, do you believe it, there mother lay dead drunk. I tell you, doctor, there ain't no use tryin'." Poor boy, he had no idea he was a hero. Sunk to the lowest depths himself—then with eighteen months help from the State—he goes back, and tries to lend a helping hand to his poor, degraded mother.

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Friends, the divine spark is in each one of those children. Let us then arise, reach forth, and with loving hands fan that spark into a flame that will so illumine that poor, abused, shivering body, that it will become a beacon light of hope to children yet unborn.

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